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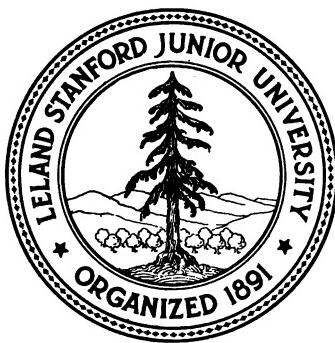
The Prodigal



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THE PRODIGAL



CLUNIE ROBERT

— 1 —



The Prodigal

BY

MARY HALLOCK FOOTE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
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"Let him commute his eternal fear with a temporal suffering, preventing God's judgment by choosing one of his own." — JEREMY TAYLOR.

I

AN August fog was drifting inland from the bay. In thin places the blue Contra Costa hills showed through, and the general grayness was tinged with pearl. San Francisco dripped and steamed along her bristling water-front ; derricks loomed black, and yards and topmasts reddened, as a fringe of winter woodland colors up at the turn of the year.

Morton Day, a young New Englander who filled the place of "outside man" for Bradshaw & Company, was working over some cargo lists in the general office on Sansome Street. The Bradshaws represented one of the oldest

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shipping and commission houses in the South Sea and Oriental trade ; the time being nearly twenty years ago, before the decay of the great clipper lines, and before the "moral sense" of the laboring man of California had rebelled against the importation of coolies.

Morton Day looked up. A tall figure came between him and the light, bringing the smell of the docks, and advertising its owner's condition in scareheads of shabbiness.

"What can I do for *you*?" asked Day. Neither his time nor sympathies were subject to draught that morning. The answer came coolly, in the accent of an English gentleman.

It is not always safe to place an American by his speech : there are so many variations of us, geographical and racial, and we run so to slang and the dialects. But an Englishman's class accent is bred in the bone. He cannot pawn it like his watch, or stake and lose it like his money. Such, at least, had been Day's experience on the water-front of the City of Strangers. When he heard that rich chest register, emanating from the disguise of a com-

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mon seaman the night before he ships, he said to himself: "Here's another of them; another gentleman wool-gatherer, come back shorn."

The stranger had asked — with his hands in the pockets of his greasy overalls — to speak with "one of the heads of the firm."

An ironical pause followed. Day had the advantage of his vis-à-vis, who saw in him but an every-day type of the well-equipped young business man, while presenting in himself the sort of quarry a romancer or a reporter would hunt down. White he appeared to be, by his features and his bold, blue, roving eye; Apache, by his skin, over which a recent shave had spread a bloom like a light hoarfrost. His utter destitution, verging on nakedness, in a feebler frame would have been pitiful, but in such a sturdy young tramp, so splendidly set up, it gave him rather an outrageous and truculent air.

"Very sorry," said the shipping clerk dryly.
"Mr. Bradshaw is not down yet."

"Mr. Felix Bradshaw?"

"Neither of them. Better try again later."

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The other did not move. "I've an appetite for breakfast," he remarked, "that is cutting me in two. Could you manage to push my little interview with your chiefs? Sorry I haven't a card about me." He laughed, with a flash of big white teeth lighting his extraordinary mask of tan; and, to point the jest, he stripped open his one upper garment and showed a forty-four-inch chest as bare as the breast of Hermes and the color of manzanita wood in sunshine.

"Jove! what a swell he'd be in an outrigger!" thought Day. "He must have peeled a dozen times before he got that lacquer on him!" Aloud, he said: "Trees were scarce where you came from, I take it?"

The stranger did not dally with conversation. He clapped both hands upon his yearning epigastrium and doubled himself over them expressively. "I shall turn turtle here in the shop unless somebody fills me up with something!"

"We will see about that!" said Day, and was wiping his pen when Mr. Bradshaw, senior,

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came in. Now, the firm had had a long-suffering acquaintance with interesting dead-beats, foreign and domestic. Fathers of wild boys, who knew not else what to do with them, sent them out to their San Francisco agents with firm instructions to put them through the mill; and blamed the miller when their rotten grain made worthless flour, and was thrown upon the heap. Every young remittance man who had overdrawn his home allowance came to them for a temporary loan, on the strength of his connections, which the connections seldom made good.

The chief's welcome, therefore, to this stalwart child of calamity was not effusive.

"That young man will attend to your business," he said, indicating Day, and walked toward his private office.

The stranger stood in his path. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Bradshaw; my business is with you. I am starving,—Andrew Robert's son, here in your counting-room, where you have made your thousands out of him!"

The chief smiled grimly. "I have no remembrance of making any thousands out of

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‘Andrew Robert’s son.’ Where do you come from ? ”

“I shipped from Sydney, last February, in the bark Woolahrá, that foundered off Cape St. Lucas. Don’t you answer letters, up here ? I think I have written you by every steamer.”

Mr. Bradshaw looked the youngster over from head to foot, — from the grimy yachting cap on the back of his head to the sickly brogans bulging on his sockless feet, — and he spoke slowly, as to one possibly of deficient understanding.

“Mr. Robert, of Auckland, is one of our oldest correspondents,” he said, giving the name of the New Zealand banker and capitalist its fullest value. “Some months ago he advised us to look out for his son, Clunie” —

“Clunie is my name,” the boy broke in. “I’m the only, original” —

“To look out for his son, by the Woolahrá, consigned to us from Sydney,” Mr. Bradshaw pursued. “There were some special instructions which may or may not concern your case. The Woolahrá was wrecked, as you say, and

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the survivors, as they found their way up the coast, reported to us. Clunie Robert was not among them."

"Naturally,—when he was writing you all the while from the Cape!"

"One moment, please. I was going to say that a person signing himself Clunie Robert has been claiming our assistance from the Cape. Granting you may be that person, you must be aware that no business house can honor an unknown signature. Mr. Robert has an account with us, but we cannot permit a stranger, however unfortunate, to draw on it, in the name of his son, unless he were able to give us some proof of his identity."

"Great God above! Did you ever try to prove your own identity, stark naked, sir, on a strip of sand, six thousand miles from home? I was in the boat that was smashed on Los Tres Hermanos,—the only man of us who ever breathed again. That was my introduction to your blessed continent. And I have n't acquired much"—he surveyed the rags he stood in—"by way of identity since."

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Mr. Bradshaw felt of his legal side whisker and appeared to consider.

“ May I ask,” inquired the castaway, “ why my signature was not submitted to my father? Does he know by chance that I ’m alive ? ”

“ The Cape letters have *all* been forwarded,” said Mr. Bradshaw distinctly, “ including a requisition for certain articles in the nature of a lady’s wardrobe, to be procured by us, charged to account of Mr. Robert. The order footed up to some hundreds of dollars, and professed to have reference to an approaching wedding at the Cape.”

“ Mine,” said the scapegrace. “ The bride was the lightkeeper’s daughter. I ’d been living on the old man, wearing his clothes, smoking his cigars, and drinking his mescal. Had to square accounts somehow. The proposition pleased him as long as he thought I had credit up here. But when you gave me the go-by, things were not so pleasant. *Did* you forward that list to the pater ? ”

“ Certainly,” said Mr. Bradshaw.

A long, low whistle was the comment of its

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author. "Well! it was a blazing bluff," he sighed. "I was trying for a stay of proceedings. Had to keep the band playing. The curtain wouldn't rise. They were howling for their money at the door!"

Day felt inclined to laugh at these mixed metaphors; but in a moment the situation changed. "D' you mean to say you have n't *heard* from my father, — not since he got that list?"

"Sit down," said Mr. Bradshaw, not unkindly. "There is no possible way of verifying your claim at present, — and if it were established, we have no authority to assist you to the extent you probably expect. Quite otherwise, in fact. Mr. Robert, the gentleman you refer to as your father, will not be heard from in a long time, I fear. He has gone on a journey, of indefinite duration — with no fixed" —

"What are you getting at? Is my father dead?" The youngster struck his hands together passionately.

Mr. Bradshaw blinked. He hated all violence, gesturing, and sudden noises, being in his

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habits not unlike an elderly and well-bred house cat. "Did I say he was dead?" he retorted irritably. "He is traveling,—for his health, I presume. You would better get something to eat, sir. It might help you to compose yourself. Go with him, Day,"—he turned to the outside man. "See that he has what he needs. Get him some clothes," he added in an undertone. "He's—really!"

Clunie had promptly risen at the first allusion to a breakfast. He faced Mr. Bradshaw with an ugly laugh. "If this is my official reception, well and good. But I am Clunie Robert, and I'll swear it,—on the hide of a black man and the blood of an Englishman!" The last-named witness burned in his mahogany-colored face as he spoke. "And you know I am not lying, even if I don't carry a house flag and can't show my papers. Papers, by thunder!" ("Thunder" was not the word he used.) He shrugged his shoulders and went out.

In the street, with a man of his own age, he recovered his nonchalance quickly. "Would he

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own me in private, d' you suppose ? A pocket handkerchief with my name on it — a birth-mark — would be handy. But my kit is at the bottom of the sea, and personally I 'm made like any other man's son. There 's no patent on me ! No ; thanks ! " he pleasantly demurred, when Day invited him to step into a clothing-store, in passing. " Beefsteak first ! I 'll eat it off the curbstone, but I can't wait."

They walked down Sansome Street to Market, — every man and woman they met staring after them, — the blue-eyed Apache with his head in the air, his collarless throat exposed, sniffing the bakeshop odors and the scent of violets which street hawkers humorously thrust upon him.

"Buy a bunch for your lady ? Put 'em in your buttonhole !" they grinned.

At Winteringham's, Day had the pleasure of watching him storm his way through a four-course breakfast, casting expressive looks across the cloth at his host. On the last course he began to pick and play a little ; almost he

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seemed ready to talk. They brought him a finger-bowl, and he lay back and gazed at it, and then at his hands. Day had been looking at those hands, and marveling greatly.

“What a pair of flippers, eh! Pretty things to dabble in a finger-glass! Gad, what would n’t I have given for *that*, not so long ago as the fruit was on the tree!” He fished out the slice of lemon awkwardly, for his hands were cramped inward like claws, and held it up between a horny thumb and finger. “Here’s to the thirst I had in the whaleboats off St. Lucas!” and he popped it into his mouth,—to the scandal of the waiter, and the open amusement of the neighboring tables.

“You were in *that*, were you?” Day interposed, trying to tone him down to a conversational level. “Rattling good sport, they say it is,—offshore whaling?”

“Oh, ripping—for the boat-steerer. But the man at the oars”—He gazed at his hands commiseratingly. “That is work they give their peons. Feel of those things!” They felt like the foot of an ostrich, and they looked

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as if he had dug wells with them, or come up from the Cape on all fours.

“Where did you get them,—*how* did you get them?” Day inquired.

The stranger lighted a cigar and crossed his long legs, regardless that he showed a yard of naked tibia, as dark and coarse as a plantation negro’s.

“I got them — in the tide-rip off St. Lucas,” said the castaway, between glorious puffs of his cigar. “Seven days a week, and thirteen hours a day, at the business end of an eighteen-foot sweep. It would have put calluses on a shark’s fin !”

“By George!” said Day, “they used you pretty hard. I thought they would treat a man white, down there.”

“As long as he *is* ‘white.’ But when he begins to turn a little shady,—figuratively speaking, you know. See, what was the last you had from me, up here ?” By the narrator’s manner, one might have supposed the entire business of the house had been hanging on his dispatches from the Cape.

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"I think you were ordering the — a — trousseau for your bride," Day reminded him.

"Quite so," he assented affably. "Well, the shadows were falling then. Happen to know anything about those good Samaritans, down there? They would split their last frijole for you or give it you whole, but when you 've worn out your welcome you had better go — if you can go. For a month or so, at first, it was 'Don Pépe' and 'Don Clunio,' and 'I kiss your hands, señor,' and the same to your feet, señorita! You know how they go on! And not a pair of Christian trousers in the whole shebang. Bags, cotton bags, that flap around your shins, — mine were halfway up my calves, — or goat-skin chap's with the hair outside, — make you look like a blooming satyr. Then your governors sweetly ignored me, and that took the wind out of my sails, as I was saying.

"The Pacific Mail captains swore they delivered my letters; 't was no go. It was *stay*, all the time! My name to a piece of paper was worth no more than a bird track in the sand; and for all my father's connections I had

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talked of — maybe I talked a bit too much, at first — I was obviously without a friend on earth. Then my stock went very low indeed. They thought if there was a Father of Lies, I was his true and only son. It was then I wrote for the trousseau. They had to pause and consider that. I flourished it before the old man's horns ; he was a covetous old brute. He didn't half believe it would come ; still, it might. So he pawed up the ground, and waited over another steamer.

“Poor little Concha, with her bare feet, running like a plover on the beach, and her chemise slipping off her shoulder ! It was a sin. But she had a month of pure felicity expecting that lace parasol and the slippers with French heels.

“How should I know your governors had no bowels ? They might have come down for something to save a poor devil's credit on a foreign shore.

“Think where I was, — great Scott ! — in a place where a man will do anything, leave him there long enough. It's the very doormat

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and scraper of the continent, where the sea is forever wiping its feet. And not a sign that any soul on earth cared a tuppenny post stamp whether I lived or died!"

By this time the young men were largely occupying the attention of the room. Busy clerks were prolonging their luncheons, to stare at the Prince of Tramps, with his case-hardened features, and drawing-room accent, and engaging manner of the family black sheep. Day expected that a reporter would be down upon them shortly. It was a fit interruption when the head waiter — he had been restless for some time — proposed that he move their seats to a side window, intimating that they were obstructing trade at the busiest hour.

The young men took the hint and went out. Robert, as Day did not scruple to call him, fell into step, with a long, joyful stride, declaring there was no music to compare with the beat of civilized shoe leather on the pavements of the cities of the world. Sick to death he was of treading beach sand, of the *pad, pad* of bare feet, and the *sluff, sluff* of sandals. White

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men for a white man forever! As for the ladies! He pretended to require Day's instant support, overcome by the sight of a pretty girl tacking across the street in one of the triced-back overskirts which were the fashion then. By the way she looked Day surmised that he had kissed his hand to her. In front of Scheiffler's he stopped and admired his full-length reflection in their plate-glass windows, humming an appropriate verse from "Poor old Robinson Crusoe!"

Day dragged him inside, where he condescendingly pulled over their ready-made stock. The needful articles having been selected, the pair boarded a cable car, and sailed up the windy sandhills to Day's lodgings, where the castaway dressed himself, grumbling like a lord at the fit of his clothes, which made him look, he said, like a discharged convict in a suit presented him by the State.

Whether this was pure animal spirits — the intoxication of a good meal — or a sort of heartsick bravado, or was put on merely to bother Day (who had a certain New England starchiness about him), cannot be said. He

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roamed about Day's room, oppressively big for the place, till his host persuaded him to sit down and finish his story. Then he pulled off his coat, which cut him in the armholes, he said, so that he couldn't talk, and sitting in his shirt sleeves by the open window he lighted a pipe and resumed: —

" Well, the Don, you see, had got tired of feeding me. And it was like sand under his eyelids to lose the rich son-in-law he had promised himself. I was ready to do my part. I'd have married anything for three meals a day — for *two* ! But he didn't want me as another cipher in the greatest common divisor, if it was on him to furnish the dividend. It was your Dutch uncles up here who stopped the proceedings. If they had sent the cash or the clothes, or recognized me in any way, there would have been a wedding at the Cape, and I should have had to furnish the bridegroom. Just as well for me; but it's a rum thing, when you think of it, — my father's son, all the heir he has got, refused by an old beggar of a Mexican lightkeeper. Refused with scorn

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and contumely, and worse ! He took back the precious wardrobe he had loaned me, to the very last stitch. He turned me out in a breechclout, so help me ! Talk of Indian politeness ! For a hat he gave me a rag to tie round my head, and the sun hits hard down there. He sold my time to the whalers : convict labor or the galleys, —call it what you will, —it 's their little way of foreclosing on an insolvent debtor. If you can't put up the *dinero*, you pays in the sweat of your brow. I paid in the sweat of my whole person and the aches of my entire bones. I was baked alive and basted ; my lips were like a piece of pork crackling ; my eyelids were puffed out even with my forehead ; my back was a running sore. I paid that debt, by —— ! if I never pay another."

" And how about the lady ? " Day inquired.
" How did you stand on her books ? "

If young Theseus had ever had a conscience about his Ariadne of the Cape, he had compounded with it, like the child of nature he was, for the price of his physical suffering. The New England boy inferred that his moral sense

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went no deeper than his skin ; hence his pride in a few blisters.

“ Bless you, a woman *is* a woman, down there ! It is He that made them, not they themselves.” (This was the use he made of his prayer book.) “ I might have opened a fresh account with Don Pépe, through Conchita’s pity for me. But I’m not vindictive,” said he, reaching for a match, “ and,” pausing to re-light, “ what would I have done with the girl, footing it up to Ensenada ! It’s a good bit of a walk, y’ know.”

“ So you did not get your discharge ? ” asked Day.

“ Not in due form. But they were easy on me toward the last. They kept a slack watch. I believe the beggars were honest. They took no more out of me than they thought was their due. It was a good few miles between meal stations, but I fetched it through. And I shipped on the brig Noyo for my grub and passage. Those slops I had on belong to a big Finlander, one of my late shipmates. I must n’t forget to return them.”

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He folded up those foul and gritty lendings as if they had been his maiden dress suit, and expressed them tenderly, at Day's expense, to one of the worst waterside dens in the city.

"And now," said he, "we will arise and go to — our Elder Brother. This is the Prodigal who came home when the Old Man was away."

But for all his high jocosity Day could see that he was nervous, that he dreaded the interview on which his status in the city would depend.

"What is *this* for?" he inquired, when Mr. Bradshaw gravely presented him with a fifty-cent piece. It was explained that he might apply each day and receive the same amount, until he should have found work, which the firm would help him to procure if he could give them some idea of his general qualification.

He listened with amusement and contempt. "I've been at work for the past eight months," said he. "Not a man you know has worked harder. I feel qualified now for a bit of recreation."

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"Recreate, then," laughed Mr. Felix, "if you know how to do it on fifty cents a day."

"We are acting," Mr. Bradshaw interposed, "in obedience to Mr. Robert's latest instructions concerning his son,—whom we understand you claim to be. We will humor your claim, under the conditions prescribed, until we hear what Mr. Robert himself has to say further in the matter."

"You will humor it to the extent of fifty cents a day!"

It was pointed out to him how easily he might be an impostor, how difficult it would be to prove that he was not, and, incidentally, that his record at the Cape had not helped him much. That he passed over as beside the mark.

"So this is not my father's money?" He weighed the silver lightly in his hand. "This is your personal half-dollar, which you risk on grounds of humanity? Well, thanks, gentlemen,—thanks awfully! I need it very much," —he laid the money down,— "and I shall need it more to-morrow, but I think I'll make

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shift to get on without it." And, perfectly good-humored, he walked to the door.

"He could n't resist getting even with us on a technical scruple," laughed Mr. Felix ; but he was nettled. Mr. Bradshaw looked grave. "Go after him," he said, laying some gold on Morton's desk. "Pilot him to a decent lodging, and keep him off a lee shore if you can."

New England overtook New Zealand (both were of unmitigated British descent) on the corner by Lotta's Fountain, which the queen of opéra bouffe presented to an appreciative city. A row of flower-peddlers' handcarts banked the slippery sidewalk. Twilight with a heavy fog was darkening in.

"Go away, child!" Day heard him exclaim to a girl who was pestering him with her unsold stock. "I've no one to take flowers to!"

"Get some one, then," she laughed, and threw a piece of myrtle at him, and a hard-voiced woman called her back to her place.

Day proposed that they go somewhere and dine together.

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"Not to-night," said Clunie. "You've had enough of me for one sitting."

But he found no difficulty in accepting a small loan from Day, not knowing its source, or not caring. He was given some advice as to lodgings and eating-places; but he made straight for the wharves, and the sea fog took him home.

At the last he had said, half defensively, as to a friend: —

"I should n't mind going to work on any decent invitation; but hanged if I'll be scourged to it, like the 'galley slave at night'! I've been galley slave too long!"

Day did not press on him his own opinion that he was one still, — and so the young men parted.

On Day's return, Mr. Felix laid a letter before him. "This is in your bailiwick," said he. "I see you've taken a liking to the young scamp. I have myself, rather; but it won't do to show it. Not at present."

"Then you think he *is* young Robert?"

"Oh, by Jove! every inch of him! The old

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man right over again. He was a high-roller himself, in early colony days. *He's* no cause to complain. But they are the very worst when they get it back in their sons. And the mother, you know," Mr. Felix added, with his free, tolerant smile,—“she cut her cables years ago. Roaming the high seas now, a ‘derelict,’ as somebody says, of the divorce courts. It broke the old man up terribly. You'd take that for the handwriting of an octogenarian. He's in fact not sixty-five !”

Day was glancing over the letter of paternal instructions to which Mr. Felix had alluded.

“Was n't the Woolahrá rather cheap transportation for a millionaire's only son ?” he asked.

“Part of the scheme of redemption,” Mr. Felix replied. “He had shut down on the boy all at once, after giving him his head since he was a kid. Moreover, the old gentleman is canny. Observe how he figures on the penitential allowance. He does n't propose to butter the bread of idleness. If Clunie wants to eat it, he 'll eat it dry.”

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“ It’s disgusting to make him come for it, in person,” said Day, still reading. “ It seems he’s not to have the cash for two days’ rations in hand at once ! ”

“ Oh, it takes an old boy who has *been* there to reckon with the deceitfulness of youth.”

“ That was why he did not write direct to his father, perhaps ? ”

“ Exactly. But you see, by that letter, we are forbidden to give him any assistance at long range. The old gentleman is sound on that head. You can’t lead a wild colt with a long halter. So you will just keep track of the festive Clunie as well as you can, but don’t meddle with him. It’s his own fight, now. It would be a pity to interfere when Mother Nature takes him across her knee. She gave him a foretaste down at the Cape, but it’s nothing to what she has in store for him, if I know this city.” Day listened, and fed his youthful cynicism with thinking on what Mr. Felix was and had been, and how well he did know the city ! In his case Mother Nature had shown thus far the partiality of the weakest

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human parent. He had had the luck of a prize scholar, and, except for a tendency to obesity, which he shared with many of the godly, appeared to have a constitution to match his theory of life.

A few days later, the outside man came across young Robert's course over in Brooklyn Basin, where a race was on between the ships' boats of some British vessels anchored there. He promptly borrowed every cent that Day had about him, and staked it on the Rathdown's boat. The Rathdowns were plunging tremendously, taking any odds that offered; they seemed to regard the race as already theirs. Clunie explained that the Rathdown had been rough-handled in a hurricane in the south latitudes, had lost one of her port boats, and put into Auckland to replace it. The boat they were entering was the Maorilander. Clunie's eyes sparkled as he studied her.

"She's of kauri pine," said he. "She's out of an Auckland yard, and they are betting against her on their thundering old British plank! Man, it's a walk-over!"

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It was a great little race. Day left their mutual winnings with Clunie, and dined with him and the British shipmasters at the Poodle Dog. Business called him away before the songs and toasts began ; but when he left them they were talking of Auckland, — Clunie's mother Auckland, — and raking all the latitudes and longitudes for mutual acquaintances.

Thereafter, for a time, he seemed to have friends and money enough. He came to the office, inquiring for letters, in a suit of Dean & Cramseys', which showed his beautiful, clean build. His hands were gloved. His bleached hair had recovered its life and lustre. The hollows were gone from around his eyes, and the high, hard burnish from his cheek bones. He looked his age, or his youth, once more. Mr. Felix frankly delighted in him : like King Hal, he loved a man. But Morton the Wise warned Clunie that neither of them could sit up nights with Mr. Felix. He was one generation nearer than they, to that tough old stock whose Plimsoll mark was the third bottle ; who bequeathed their nerves and appe-

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tites without their sledge-hammer wills and ironclad stomachs.

Clunie laughed, and said, “Sour grapes!” And, indeed, he had quite cut out Morton with his former patron. The grim old chief, meanwhile, was faithfully urging a trial of the boy, in some situation or other, among his friends; but business men who saw the company he kept smiled and had no use for him.

Mr. Felix then went to London, and the face of the city changed for Clunie. His sky-rocket life of pleasure, founded on the fancy of an idle man, had gone up like a spark, and he was left with the stick in his hand. There was nothing then in San Francisco that could have been called society. Mr. Felix lived with the notorious set, and laughed at them in certain inner circles, professional and family cliques, to which he presumably belonged. And a few persons in quiet homes were building up the sort of lives that can save any city. But of these Clunie could have known nothing, and probably deserved to know nothing.

The firm was aware of a growing anxiety

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and constraint in his manner when he made his periodical inquiries for letters or news of his father. After a while he ceased to inquire by name: he would drop in casually, and, hearing nothing to his advantage, would feign a rather careworn interest in general topics and depart, carrying the house's sympathy with him. For there was no longer any reasonable, comforting explanation of his father's silence. There was no relenting, to the effect of, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

At length, out of the pitiless region of the Unexpected, came a staggering blow. An uncle of Clunie's, in England, his father's brother, whom he had never seen, wrote to the firm, stating that Mr. Robert had arrived among his kindred in a most deplorable condition, mental and physical. He had since improved in health, but his mind had failed to such a degree that medical experts pronounced him unfit for the management of his own affairs; and the undersigned, together with another brother, had been appointed his guardians and the administrators

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of his estate. As to the presumptive heir in America, it seemed better not to act in haste. Steps were being taken toward his identification. Large property interests were at stake, and it would require time to sift his claim. Meanwhile, as his conduct appeared to have been not in all ways satisfactory, it might be well, in any case, to continue the policy which Mr. Robert had marked out for his son,— of throwing him as far as possible on his own resources, that he might learn the value of money through the need of earning it, and of friends by endeavoring to deserve them.

The chief made this communication as gently as possible, forbearing altogether to rub it in. But his attitude of sympathy was not well received ; possibly it had come too late.

From this time forth Clunie made no further scruple about accepting the despised allowance. He took it carelessly, asking no questions as to its source. He came for it every day, like a dog to the kitchen door for his bone, with far less shame than Morton had in doling it out to him, — the great, strapping fellow with his home-

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sick eyes ! He was the true Islander, of all provincials the most self-centred and haughty. Their world was not his world ; he loved them too little to mind accepting their help, or care what might be their opinion of him in so doing.

San Francisco is a city where good food is exceedingly, astonishingly cheap ; but fifty cents a day, including a night's lodging, does not leave much margin for incidentals. A man living at that figure, and gambling on his income, as Clunie probably did, cannot keep himself at the level of the polite occupations ; the mark of the slums is on him. To the slums he must go for employment. But Morton, seeing that the chiefs had done what they could for the prodigal and failed in their sphere of influence, thought that he might try an elder-brotherly experiment of his own.

In a cold-blooded way he informed him that the firm, through their outside man, was paying from sixty to seventy-five dollars per month in boat hire, and proposed that Clunie should rent a boat, till he could afford to buy one, and set

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up as a harbor boatman. Day would prefer him to the patronage of the house.

"Have n't the capital, y' know, to start me in business," was the answer. "I could n't rent the dingiest dory in the slips, on tick."

That obstacle being removed, he fell in with the plan listlessly, with the air of anything-to-oblige-a-friend. But hard and regular exercise and the spell of life on the water soon began to tone him up. His eye brightened, his skin cleared. He picked up his self-respect, the more that his place, humble as it was, by no means wanted him as he needed it. His rivals of the water front put him through a stiff competitive examination. They saw no room for an interloper with what appeared to be a "pull."

He fought them between whiles, and raced them, man to man, and captured even the reluctant admiration of those swells in port, the men-o'-war's men.

"You pulls a narsty scull, sir!" said one of the gig's crew of H. M. S. the Royal Arthur, lying out in the Bay, on her way to join the Northwest Squadron.

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“Now, why does he give you ‘sir’?” asked Day. “How does he know you are not a professional?”

“It’s easy to know things,” Clunie answered sulkily. “He could n’t hide the cut of *his* jib if he was carryin’ home the wash. It is n’t knowing things ; it’s knowing when to keep ’em to yourself, — eh, Missus? Better let sleeping dogs lie ?”

The “Missus” was one of many brevet titles bestowed at random by Clunie on a nameless pup of the undesirable sex which he had lately acquired. She was the butt of his practical jokes, the suffering medium of his high spirits, the text of his errant philosophy. She was a buffer when the two young men, in their now almost daily intercourse, drifted too close to each other’s moorings. Above all, she was a proof that he was putting out roots on foreign soil. When an Englishman takes a dog to bring up, it is equivalent to a Frenchman’s planting a salad bed.

By the following spring, Clunie, in partnership with Day (who represented the capital

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invested), was the respected and generally respectable owner of a Whitehall boat, which he christened the Salvation Lassie, in mock deference to the popular belief in the regenerative influence of hard work.

“‘This is the Way I long have sought,
And wept because I found it not,’”

he would shout, at the top of his brazen head tones, in imitation of a Salvationers’ chorus, and drum with his oars in the oarlocks.

But there were deviations from the Way. When Morton would find the boat dirty and neglected, and Clunie, in a similar condition, the worse for his chief weakness, broaching acquaintance with every species of waterside vagabond, he would ignore his partner, and go out with another man. And Clunie would have to submit to the jeers of his rivals in consequence.

But this was business.

II

THE British tramp steamer, *Sumbawa*, had been signaled as off the Heads. Day rushed down for Clunie and the boat, for it was altogether desirable that he should meet her before the customs officers came aboard. She was consigned to the Bradshaws, from Hong-Kong, with a chowchow cargo, and she had fifteen hundred coolies between decks.

There were points in maritime law on which the coolie-trade in those days considered itself forced to jibe a little. The law, it was claimed, having been made for the Western Ocean, did not fit the Asiatic. A coolie-ship's bunks were put in athwartships, which is a thing no customs officer must see. "But the heathen likes to sleep that way," argued the trade. "He battens on bad air, and he does n't mind how close he stows if he can get his passage cheaper."

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Day took the second pair of sculls, and they pulled out beyond Point Lobos, where he met his steamer and climbed aboard of her. While he was below, watching the carpenters knock out the bunks, a case of smallpox was uncovered, which the heathen had been hiding, hoping to smuggle it ashore, and so keep the patient out of the clutches of the foreign devils' doctors.

Day was overside like a shot, and he discussed the matter at long range with the captain. He had known nothing of it, of course, and he was wild. But the Sumbawa got her sixty days in quarantine, with seventeen hundred persons, white, brown, and yellow, on board. And the cost of that case of smallpox to the consignees was fifty-eight thousand dollars.

Every day the two young men rowed out to quarantine grounds to inquire after the ship's health, and superintend the unloading of fresh cases for the pest-house. They would pull to windward of her, dropping astern under her cabin ports, to heave a bundle of newspapers aboard and condole with the raging captain.

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He was one of the old stripe, with little by way of education, but such as is got at a rope's end, aboard of a "hot" ship ; but Heaven had sent him a good little wife, — a pretty one, too, — and she was the only woman on board. Often her little white face would look down from a porthole next the one that framed the captain's red chaps. Their two heads, against the ship's black, blistered side, were a curious contrast, — the extremes of a union made of spirit and flesh. Her eyebrows and eyelashes were as black as a bayadere's, but her eyes were true Northern gray.

She grew pinched in the face and paler, day by day, for the foul sickness was spreading, and that ship was a floating hell. The coolies forward were in open mutiny, as far as uproar and intention went, resisting vaccination and fighting like demons when they were carried off the ship.

The captain became confidential, and sounded the young men, when his wife was not by, on a scheme for smuggling her ashore, in which he was frankly counting on their assistance.



THE SUMBAWA HAD BEEN SIGNALLED AS OFF THE HEADS

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He was not delicate of speech, but in his rough way he felt her situation keenly.

“She’s a countrywoman of yours, boys,” he began diplomatically. “She’s an American. I found her in Hong-Kong teaching.”

“I’m not an American!” sang out Clunie from the boat.

The captain changed his quid and touched his cap to Clunie. “I thought ye were born under the old rag. The less you cares for the laws of a foreign port, eh?”

“Quarantine laws are the laws of civilization,” Day warned him.

“Grant you that! Ain’t we a-keeping them? But my wife don’t come into this case. What has she got to do with them pigtails down below? ‘Ere she is in a home port, the first time in seven years, and caught in this infernal plague-trap. . . . And every day,” he lowered his voice, “brings her nearer to her time, when a woman needs a woman’s help. Whoever comes aboard of us stays in hell with us to the end. Where’s the female who’ll do that, I ask you? The wife’s sister might, but she’s

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not here. She 's up in one o' the Puget Sound ports. And I would n't allow it, anyhow. It 's not justifiable. But something, I say, has got to be done. You 're not family men yourselves, but you may be. And every man is the woman's brother in a case like this. Come, boys, for the sake of the mother that was,— for the sake of the wife that will be!"

It was strong talk, and the tone of the captain's eloquence was very strong of whiskey. The combined effect, with other considerations, was decidedly repellent to Day. They were not the men for the emergency, he told the captain ; it was work for their betters.

The captain recognized the excuse, and it angered him. "Where *are* your betters ? The best man for me is him that 'elps me now ! She can't afford to wait, if you was to charter us an angel."

"Had he spoken to the doctors ?" Day asked.

"To the devil with the doctors ! Did they know by chance what a coolie-ship doctor would be ?"

The quarantine doctor ? He cursed him as

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well. *He* was a part of their blankety-blanked political machine. “ ‘E would n’t risk ’is job to save every life on board. ‘E farms us out,— so many vaccinations at a dollar the ’ead,— and a sweet time they ’as with some of us! You ’ear those devils now? ”

The coolies were confined behind the iron bulkheads forward; they were banging on their prison walls and howling like the damned.

Clunie dipped his oars softly, to keep the boat off her proper length from the ship. The ten feet of water that divided them was the Gulf of Common Sense. Day, for his part, had no mission to cross it.

The captain’s angry, troubled eye fixed itself suddenly on a point behind Day’s head. Turning, the latter caught a lightning wink pass from Clunie to the captain, who dropped his eyes and pretended that some one had called him.

Clunie gave his partner a forcible hint in the back, for just then the quarantine watch strolled over to the side, and warned them not to come too near.

Nothing was said in the boat going home.

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Clunie knew that Day must know of his tacit offer to the captain. He also knew that Day would neither argue with him nor interfere.

When the misty August nights grew darker by the absence of a moon, Clunie informed his partner that he need not look for him on his beat for a day or two — or three. He brought him the Missus, and requested him to care for her, with obliging particulars as to the diet best suited to the period of canine dentition.

“Have you found your second man?” asked Day.

“I shall have to make it alone,” said Clunie. “Too many in the secret now. Speke has fixed it up with Black Jake, one of the stevedores, for a place on shore. A shady outfit they are. The house has been empty a year. It is up Petaluma Creek, a little this side of Vallejo.”

“Forty miles, if it’s one!” said Day. “And you will have to start with the tide against you, or you won’t get high water in the creek; and you can’t get up it without. It is full of nasty shoals and eelgrass. You need another man, Clunie.”

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“Dare say I do. I need a steam launch ! But it’s this way : the sort of help you could hire for a job like this might sell you out to the harbor police. Blest if I know any man we could trust. Why won’t you come, yourself ? ‘Afraid of the smallpox ?’ ”

“Well, *yes*,” said Day, though Clunie knew this was not his reason. “Are n’t you ? But I’m a good deal more afraid of the pesthouse. If you catch it, old man, shoot yourself, — drop yourself into the bay, but don’t go there !”

“It’s no barge picnic,” Clunie admitted. “But they will do the proper thing about disinfecting, of course. That’s understood.”

“They think they will. But who ever does, — unless it’s done under orders ? You can’t persuade a woman to burn her clothes. She will make some doting exception, and that will fix you.”

“Hang it ! There is the bay, then ! If I turn up missing, you need n’t inquire for me at the bourn whence no traveler returns.”

Missing he was, and still absent, when, four days later, Day rowed out alone, to quarantine

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for a quiet word with the captain. In the interval he had avoided speech with him, not feeling entitled to seek his confidence, after refusing him his help.

The captain was on deck, pacing back and forth against the one low strip of color in the west. The yellow quarantine flag was at half-mast. He did not perceive Day — the surface of the water being muffled in light fog — until the customary signal had been given. Then he stopped, looked toward the boat without replying to her hail, and went below. Directly his head appeared at the more confidential level of his cabin windows. Outwardly the man was changed for the worse in the brief interval since Day had seen him near. His unshaven dew-lap hung over a soiled collar ; his flesh looked flabby and old. Yet there was an effect of dumb dignity about him which Day, out of an uneasy consciousness, mistook at first for resentment.

He began to question him cautiously.

“ Have you seen anything of Robert, captain ?
He has n’t been around lately.”

The captain cleared his throat. “ ’Ave n’t

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you 'eard, then ? Bad news, they say, travels fast."

" Not a word, captain. Sorry it 's bad news." Day was thinking only of Clunie, persuaded that he had made a mess of his heroics, somehow.

" Come in closer — fetch 'er in ! You 've no more to fear from us. We 've 'ad our last case. It takes the best you 've got, and then it quits."

" Captain, you don't mean — your wife, she has n't *got* it ? " The sickness they always spoke of as " it. "

" Naw, naw ! " the captain groaned. " She 's past all that. It 's all in the same bill o' goods, though. A piece o' foul mismanagement from the start. I 've no wish to be 'ard on Robert. 'E 's pretty much a fool ; but 'e done the work, — 'e got her there, Lord knows how ! Forty miles inside of eight hours. You can tell 'em that when you 'ears 'em throwin'off on Clunie."

" Captain, it 's impossible ! " said Day. And though the outside man has told this story in select company many times since, he invariably

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balks at the distance when he tells it to any one who happens to know that course : the tide rip off Alcatraz and the eight or ten miles of heavy work above. Then, when you have reached your bottom reserve, when you have settled to your stroke and can just hold it, if nothing jars you or throws you out, when every change of course, or slightest motion in the boat, is pure, utter agony,—then to wash into the weeds and shoals and maddening windings of the creek ! The perspiration started as he thought of it.

“ Captain, why did he make it a race ? Were they chased ? ”

“ A race it was — *for the life of the child.* Her time was come, — unexpected, mind. I would n’t ’ave played that trick on no man. But it was more than nature could bear, what we undertook to do, with such ’elp as the Lord allowed us. You may say it was work for our betters !

“ If we ’ad rigged a bo’sun’s chair and sent her down comfortable an’ handy — The watch would ’ave seen her, you say ! They ’re men : they ’ad to wink at the job as it was ; they

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might 'ave winked a little 'arder. But we lowered her — damn fools ! — from one o' the lumber ports, away aft. We 'ad to put her in the sling, and she was frightened going overside."

"Don't talk of it, captain." Day tried to spare him. But he went on, like a man transfix'd, tugging at the shaft in his breast. His speech was hot with pain.

"Talk ! What's left but talk ? *She* 'ad the bearin' of it ! If you're too damn delicate to listen, why sheer off, in God's name ! I know the sort you are !" he raved. " You left'er to Providence and the doctors ! If you 'ad a stood by Clunie as he stood by her — as he tried to — she might be a livin', 'appy mother now. Arsk Clunie ! It has taken his blood down.

"The house was back, a cable's length from the creek, and up a hill. 'E 'ad to carry her, and 'e said 'e could n't 'ardly see. His underlip was draggin' in the sand. But 'e fetched her in. Then he lay down in the porch, for there was no more in him. He remembers the black woman telling him he must up and go for help,

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and 'e says, ' Give me a drink, — anything at all, — and maybe I can start.' He gives her the credit for denying him, but 'ave it 'e would, and more than 'e needed. And that night, that *next* night — all that time, and *yet for want of help!* But the woman could n't leave her ; and she was ignorant as a horse. She was n't for that work. And Clunie sleepin' off his liquor !

" He 's doin' now what the law won't let me do for my own flesh and blood. Did I tell you she left me a fine boy ? But I don't wish to see his face nor 'ave 'im come anigh this cursed ship. We 'ave sent for the little sister, and if she 's true to the breed she 'll do. I want to find a berth for her here in the city, if she 'll bide and keep the child and bring him up right and proper, as his mother would. But everything is out o' my reach. I 'm chained up 'ere like a house dog. I can bark till I burst ; it won't help nor hinder.

" Well, give a grip of my 'and to Robert, and bid him quit calling of himself a beast, — the more as I count on him now to take my place ashore. He says the black woman has

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froze onto that baby : let 'er tie up, then, alongside the little sister. But you look her up, and see what sort she is."

Day accepted this humble trust as a proof of the captain's forgiveness, and silently pulled off from the ship. A night of fog cloaked the water ; he rowed home slowly, piloted by red and green lanterns that pricked through the murk from invisible docks and ferry slips along-shore and from ghostly vessels in the harbor. The city's crown of lights arched upward in the distance like an announcement of moonrise in some dream country where mists take the shape of mountains and the mountains are like brooding mists.

He thought of that house up Petaluma Creek, where the young mother lay among strangers ; and he thought of Clunie, sleeping his brutish sleep at the door of the holy of holies, while the great angels of Life and Death fairly brushed him with their wings. His absence, his reticence when he did appear, his loss of flesh and averted eye, seemed to promise some approach to seriousness in the Prodigal ; but whether

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the change in him would outlast the shock of his failure, the shame of it in the very hour of triumph, there were none who knew him or his forbears well enough to prophesy.

The Sumbawa had cleared for Hong-Kong, and the captain's son was left in charge of the maiden aunt. She had come up to everybody's expectations of her in all possible ways, Day learned — from hearsay ; he was offered no opportunity of judging for himself. Clunie appeared to be taking full and jealous advantage of the responsibility magnanimously conferred upon him by the captain, and was by no means as generous in sharing it.

“ About what age is she ? ” Day inquired.
“ Is she a suitable age for an aunt ? ”

That question Clunie put beneath his feet.

“ Is she pretty ? ”

This also was ignored ; but the boy's face answered for him, chiefly in a forced stolidity which did not deceive. Day pleaded with him to introduce him — to the baby, at least.

“ It 's a house of mourning, you blasphemer !

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Do you think I go there to amuse myself ? I am their striker. When she is ready to make acquaintances — if you want to know how old she is — she is old enough to choose them for herself."

About this time it became evident that Clunie was "making a deal with himself" on the question of drink. Naturally, his best friends were incredulous that it would come to anything. Bets were exchanged as to the issue. But, seeing him tested on one or two occasions, with no sign of his weakening, Day challenged an explanation, "Whence and how is this ? "

Clunie turned a fighting red on the instant, — a color that showed the heart of his endeavor, for which he blushed before the eyes of men. That it had a heart was all Day asked to know.

One evening he met him again at Lotta's Fountain, and again the flower sellers were besieging him, but he was not standing them off, as before. Morton waylaid him, and the friends walked uptown together, Clunie ostentatiously explaining that his violets were for the captain's

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baby. At Marteau's he stopped for a box of confectionery ordered, evidently, and waiting for him.

"Also for the baby?" Day inquired.

He gave a short laugh, an irrepressible crow, as if the question had touched him under the short ribs of recollection or pleased reminiscence. "These for the baby!" he chuckled. "She thinks that sweet stuff for that infant is the sum of all earthly wickedness."

"And eats it herself to save him the temptation, I suppose?"

"You are to remember that she takes these things seriously. It's quite the greatest thing out to hear them argue."

"*Them!* Does that boy argue with his aunt already?"

"*She* argues with old — Egypt, the nurse, whatever her shady title is."

"Is 'she' carrying the gospel into Egypt?"

"Quite so!" said Clunie. "She has the latest advices on the food question. Remarkably sound she is, too. But the old mammy kicks like a steer. 'Honey knows what he

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wants,' she says, 'an' he knows *when* he wants it. Talk 'bout hours! All hours is his hours, and he ought to have it, too.'

"But he does n't get it, all the same. She has him down to the fraction of a minute, and he does n't get it any sooner by howling. What am I talking about? His bottle, of course!"

Day said that he blushed for him, but Clunie, insensible to the obligation, continued to revel in details the most ignoble, declaring it was his own doctrine long ago applied in the training of thoroughbred pups.

"Just little creatures of habit," she says they are; and they might as well be learning good habits as bad. You educate their stomachs first because that is the seat of their ideas; that's where the tussle between will and appetite begins. She claims that a four-months babe can be taught self-control. He can learn to have faith that his grub basket's going to be filled when the time comes, and it won't come a minute sooner for his yelling.

"It's great to see them when feed-time is

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almost up ! He gets nasty in his temper ; he stuffs his fists into his mouth ; he breaks out into howls. He digs his gums into her cheek — he bites, by Jove ! And she hauls him around where she can look him in the eye, and she appeals to his higher faculties. She shows him things ; she interests him. He forgets the old Adam in his belly.”

“ Ethics of the Nursing Bottle ! ” said Day, in high derision. “ The doctrine may be sound, but it has chosen a weird mouthpiece.”

“ I ’m telling you a thing which you ought to respect. If you don’t, so much the worse for you. *I* was brought up on the plan of give him whatever he howls for. I can appreciate what she is doing for him ! ”

“ Just give me the key to that feminine pronoun, once for all, will you ? Does ‘ she ’ invariably stand for Miss Dunstan ? ”

“ Oh, be blowed ! ” said Clunie parenthetically. “ The method you might get out of books,” he went on, infatuated with his subject, or with some train of associations born of it ; “ but the practice, mind you, is another thing.

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The patience, the cleverness, the jolly little dodges by way of passing the time, and the downright, on-the-square way she treats him, when the time won't pass and all the dodges fail.

" 'Now, hold on to yourself, sonny,' she says when he's raging mad for his bottle, and the old darky waltzes round as if she'd like to kill anybody that kept it from him. 'Hold on to yourself!' she says. And she shows him how to do it! She is building up his digestion and his manners and his character generally on the basis of that bottle."

" You ought to go on the lecture tour, you and your Bottle; with lantern views of the subject Being Educated to Wait: his appearance and behavior during the first hour; the second, — second and a half. Perhaps Miss Dunstan would consent to accompany you, and furnish illustrations with a living subject."

" Have you heard of a certain kind of person that came to scoff and stayed to pray? You'll get there if you keep on!" Clunie retorted, not altogether displeased with this badi-

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nage. “ You see she has to fight against old Egypt all the time. The old girl tries to undermine his morals with poking things into him between meals. She seduces him with forbidden goodies that make him wink his eyes and look thoughtful.

“ ‘ I don’ know noffin’ ‘bout books,’ she says, ‘ an’ I don’ b’liebe much in doctahs, but I ’se *had* ten chillen, and buried seben of ‘em ! Books can’t larn me noffin’.’

“ Then — a — Miss Dunstan lets down her eyelashes, for fear she ’d have to smile. She ’s awfully nice to that old beast, on account of her saving the boy’s life at the start, perhaps. It ’s well she saved something ! ”

“ Has ‘ *she* ’ got eyelashes, too ? ” Day inquired.

“ Has she got what ? ”

“ Do you remember what wonderful eyelashes the sister had ? ”

“ Do you want me to chuck you out of that window ? You ’ll be good enough to listen to what I ’m saying, or keep your unsightly thoughts to yourself.”

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“ You have told me all I want to know,” laughed Day, rising, “ and more than I ever expected to know, without seeing the lady herself. She ’ll have a bib tucked under your chin, my son, and be teaching you to wait, before you know it ! ”

“ By the Lord, I wish she could ! ” said Clunie devoutly.

But, profane jesting aside, Day was immensely interested to see how simply the Prodigal — of a civilization both older and younger than ours — took himself in this phase of what might have been called driveling innocence. He longed to have Mr. Felix hear Clunie hold forth. That he should set up as a gospeler of the nursery, and preach sermons on the Bottle, as unembarrassed as the day he related his adventures at the Cape ! His moral naïveté was delicious.

So the irrepressible conflict went on between the powers of light and of darkness ; and Day learned from that awestruck disciple, Clunie, that “ she ” was now reaping her reward. The proof of the pudding had come, and the four-

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months babe was a Christian philosopher wonderful to see. The hour for refreshment arrived on wings of balmy expectation. He never lost hold of himself now. He had succumbed to the law, and was safe in the arms of a faith that had never yet deceived him.

“ I don’t believe she has forgotten him once ! ” said Clunie, as if speaking of miracles. “ She keeps the watches herself. Old Egypt has no sense of time or anything else.”

Day had observed the insulting harshness with which Clunie invariably spoke of his former associate in a certain dark night’s work of distressful memory. The sore spot had not healed with time and the compensations time had brought. It might also imply that he was sensitive in a new quarter ; as well he might be, for the negress held his reputation, such as it was, at the mercy of her coarse and rambling tongue. And Miss Dunstan was no doubt a frequent if an unwilling listener.

Clunie remarked, one day, with an absent half smile on his features, that “ she ” had a will “ as fine and soft as steel ; but there ’s no let go.”

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And Day, being in a mood to spare him, merely added that "she" seemed to be on the whole a good deal of a person,—to have come out of "one of the Puget Sound ports."

Clunie sat up at that. "The captain's boy will have reason to think so! It's the safest port he'll ever make. Luckiest little beggar I know!"

"One would hardly have said so four months ago!" Day reminded him. It struck them both, in silence, the awful and condign way life has of getting on without us,—any one of us, the most necessary and dear. Nature has always a stopgap ready. She gets her work done at any cost, and out of destruction and waste new issues are framed which she adopts as calmly as if they had been part of the original plan.

Poor little Mrs. Speke, wiped out of existence at the moment, it would seem, of her supreme usefulness, had bequeathed to that tropical infant, Clunie Robert, his one effective spiritual opportunity,—while her own child had never missed her, was better off perhaps without her;

The Prodigal

and her husband was consoling himself, after the manner of his species, in a foreign port.

The fool had rushed in, but the angels were not far behind him.

“What is the young gentleman’s schedule at present? Is he on for dog-watches still?” Morton asked one day.

“I believe he has to go three hours now,” said Clunie gravely. He was perfect in their “nursery patter,” as Day called it, so that it was “sickening” to hear him.

“Then what do you say: if ‘she’ can be off duty three hours at a stretch, suppose we get tickets for ‘A Scrap of Paper’?”

“Scrap of your aunt!” said Clunie roughly.

“Be careful, my son! There is an aunt whose name may not be taken in vain. Such, at least, was my impression. It might do ‘your aunt’ good to have a little change from the society of infants and — What is the old colored female’s name? Has she got a name?”

“Dare say she has, but it does n’t matter. Miss Dunstan would n’t go, anyhow, on account of her mourning.”

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“ Of course.” Day admitted he should have remembered that. He then proposed that they take the boat and the baby, bottle, and all, and go up — Here he came near to making a second blunder on his friend’s account.

“ No, thanks,” said Clunie. “ No barge picnics for me — in *that* direction.”

“ Well, what will you do ? You ought to celebrate Washington’s Birthday in some way, you off-sided alien ! ”

“ She has an engagement on for G. W.’s Birthday,” said Clunie, looking almost too indifferent.

“ Well, you and I, then. What do you say to Ingleside ? ”

“ I — a — I shall be busy part of the day.”

“ You — sinner ! ”

Clunie met the laughter in his friend’s eyes, and then he fell upon him and hurled him all over the place. When he was through with him, temporarily, Day rose and dusted himself off. “ You — sinner ! ” he repeated. Clunie looked down at him through narrowed eyelids, breathing short. He was flushed and white

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about the mouth and nostrils with the clearness of his ridiculous health, and those unexceptionable habits which he was acquiring through association with the higher ethical training for infants.

"I wish," he said simply, dropping his guard, "I wish I had never been more of a sinner than I hope to be next Thursday come Washington's Birthday."

"Our institutions are having their effect," Day remarked, not to take advantage.

On the morning before the legal holiday, Mr. Bradshaw had requested that Day get word to Clunie that he was wanted at the office. He reported himself the same afternoon with Missus treading on his shadow as usual. But Missus was not invited, like her master, to step into the private office ; she sat on her heels outside with her keen little head on a slue. When chairs were moved within, and her master appeared, she executed the double manœuvre of throwing herself at his feet and avoiding their advancing stride. He came down the long room, neither seeing nor hearing. All the

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clerical rank and file knew that that tingling half hour with the chief meant no less than the sword touch on the shoulder for the late vagabond. He was one of them, now.

It might be said that the firm had its tricks, like others of the trade ; it had its code as well. Its house flag was known in the ends of the earth ; and the lowest and latest incumbent, the office boy hired the day before, used the commercial “ we,” and thought the more of himself for being able to do so.

In front of Morton’s desk Clunie halted. “ How long is it since the morning I stood here, and you asked me, ‘ What can I do for *you*? ’ and I wanted to kick you for the way you said it ? ”

“ Two years ago last August,” Day answered, on reflection.

“ Well, Mort, you have done several things for me : one thing you have left me alone. I am to have Weeks’s place,” he added. “ Do you know how he lost it ? ”

Day could have guessed, and so could Clunie.

“ Well, shall we sell the Lass ? ”

The Prodigal

Day said that he was in no particular hurry.
Was it best to burn their bridges?

"You think I won't stick," said Clunie. "I say that we sell her. I want some clothes, and I want them now!"

So they sold the Salvation Lassie, and Clunie bought what he called a "rattling good suit" and accessories with his and Day's share of the proceeds, intimating that it was the last time he intended to honor their friendship in that way.

On Thursday, the holiday, Morton dined early with friends at Oakland, and crossed the ferry, coming home, at the hour when suburban trains discharge their loads of excursionists,—not the cream of the cream, but just Nobodies and their wives and sweethearts. Nobody is a lucky dog, sometimes. Day caught sight of Clunie, half a head above the procession, with a light in his face as if Happiness had made him her color-bearer. Day knew, as well as if he had seen her, who it was that his comrade was convoying through the press. He looked suffused with pride and consciousness, as a man looks who feels for the first time on his arm the

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thrill of a little hand,—the hand that can lead him, or send him, to the world's end ; that will quietly bind him to his proper work in life and make the yoke easy and the burden light, or gall and chafe and fetter him to his grave.

As the crowd dispersed in search of seats, there was the truant pair with every appearance of the surfeited picnicker ; and behind them rolled the transport, mother Egypt, with the captain's boy asleep in her arms.

Day was surprised to see that the paragon who had worked such a change in Clunie was but a small, plain-faced woman, older than he, apparently ; with no adventitious charm of coloring or coquetry likely to catch the fancy of a South Sea prodigal. It is the real thing this time, thought Day ; and conscience rebuked him for his many and flippant allusions to the maiden aunt in his intercourse with Clunie.

The nurse had dropped into her seat with a sigh, and began wagging her knees to hush the stirring sleeper. They piled their lunch basket and their faded wild flowers into the vacant place beside her, while Clunie helped Miss

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Dunstan with her jacket. Sleeves were tight, as well as skirts, in those days ; she slid into hers, and hurriedly busied herself with the buttons, and he gave her the ends of her boa to cross beneath her chin. Then, with one swift look into each other's eyes — which she disclaimed by looking away again severely — they walked forward to the bow.

Clunie's hands were in his pockets, his knees were braced against the rail ; but she leaned in a plastic attitude, her fingers loosely clasped, her eyes fixed on the boat's progress in the dark. Morton hastily revised his first judgment on her appearance, for a sweeter side face no woman ever owned. She had her sister's low feminine forehead and deep black lashes, but a stronger, finer mouth and chin.

Now, why does n't the idiot speak, he wondered. Perhaps he had spoken ; but no, there was as yet no definite understanding between them,— only a nebulous consciousness on her part ; and Clunie was holding on to himself as he never had done in his life before. He knew his reasons best.

III

IT was windy, white-cloud weather, high tides and a full moon. The Parthenia lay at Mission Dock loading with wheat for Liverpool. She was one of Ward and McAlpine's steamers.

A week or so before she sailed, Day was down at her agents' office, engaging a stateroom aboard of her for the wife and sister of one of the firm's correspondents in Honolulu. The ladies had just arrived, on their way to England, and were visiting friends in the city. It happened, as we say, — not knowing whether anything ever does happen, — that Clunie Robert was with him. They were kept waiting while a round little pony-built Mexican woman was taking passage on the same ship for herself and child. Her back was toward them, but there was no mistaking her accent, or her hair — or her hat, with its artless reds and greens. Her voice was low, and she laughed continually over

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her efforts to translate her business into English. Fred Dowd, the shipping clerk, did his gallant best to meet her halfway in Spanish, and by his civility and the giddy way in which he wasted his time, and theirs, the young men concluded there would be one pretty woman, at least, on the Parthenia that trip.

Strictly speaking, it was Day who made these reflections, for Clunie had retired, according to a habit of his, noticeable of late, whenever he caught the Mexican-Spanish inflection. One of the rudimentary lessons of a lifetime had been bitten into him in that tongue ; and some lessons, like vaccination, do not "take" at once. He had waited by the door and was watching the woman's child, for he was always interested in the young of any species. The little one had slipped down from a chair where its mother had left it, and was playing with the pattern of the cane-seat, exploring the meshes as pitfalls for a tiny forefinger no bigger than the stump of a lead pencil. Presently the finger slipped through too far and stuck by reason of its fatness. Day made a step forward, expecting

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a howl, but Clunie said: "Let him be. He's game."

It was a baby in frocks, but Clunie had dubbed him a boy by the way in which he conducted that affair of the finger. He tugged and twisted and hung on by it, till it was rasped crimson; he set his brows, casting indignant glances at the strange spectators who smiled and offered no help.

"Hey," said Clunie, much diverted, "his cap is over his starboard peeper and his face is as red as a beet. He'll yell directly." And he did. The mother turned, with a flash in her big, dark eyes, and the young men drew off rather guiltily.

The child threw itself with sobs upon her bosom. Its cap slipped off, and showed a fine, broad-topped head, pink with rage, and shining all over with curls no longer than a lamb's fleece and yellow as summer seed-grass.

Day turned, with some remark about the handsome little hybrid; but Clunie looked at him as if he had been the wall, and walked out of the place. They were on their way further

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to keep an appointment which was Clunie's more than Day's. Morton followed his friend as far as the sidewalk and saw him standing on the corner below, staring straight before him with a fixed, expressionless face, the external consciousness knocked apparently clean out of him. The matter looked too serious for jocular meddling. Day did not hail him, but let him go, and finished their joint business alone and not in the best of spirits.

He met the mother and child face to face again as he was returning to McAlpine's office. She was a rather handsome young woman, chiefly eyes, the grave, soft, animal-like eyes of her race — the Indian half of it. Her natural suppleness was spoiled by stays, and of course she could not wear the hat of civilization — but she did, with the effect of its making her look bold and hard. She was a pretty piece of degeneracy, a child of Nature in the fatal transition stage.

On the shadow of a hint, Fred Dowd would have satisfied his curiosity concerning her ; but Day had a strong disinclination to know more

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than he could avoid knowing, in this case. If Madam Nemesis had looked at Clunie out of that woman's dark eyes, what she had to say to him was a matter for them to settle. A year ago, Clunie would hardly have paid her the tribute of a pale face and a hasty retreat. Conscience had never made a coward of him before.

Day rebuked himself duly for assuming that it was conscience, but having yielded to suspicion, little confirmatory suggestions were not wanting. He found himself a trifle constrained with his friend when they met next day. But Clunie was indifferent and preoccupied.

The Bradshaws' outside man was down about the docks a good deal while the Parthenia was loading. He noticed that her people seemed to be taking big chances on getting her to sea. A few days before she was to sail, he said to Clunie: "Do you know what I have done? Persuaded those ladies to wait over for the Roscommon. I took their names off the Parthenia's list to-day."

"What for?"

The Prodigal

“ Well ; she is a new ship in the Pacific trade. Grannis has never taken her out from the Heads before. And he is one of these banner-freight captains, — almost too clever about getting ahead of the inspectors. They have pumped out her water ballast and are loading her, light as she is, down to her Plimsoll’s mark. She is a very long, high-sided vessel — top-heavy as she lies ; and, to cap all, they are getting a deck-load of extra coal aboard of her. Some of her coal bunkers have been used for wheat, the stevedores say. If she happens to strike it rough, going over the Bar, she will turn turtle before they can get the water ballast back into her compartments.”

“ Are you the only one who says so ? ”

“ I am not the only one who thinks so. But Grannis knows it all ! And, of course, the trick has not been tried — with that vessel. She may go out all right.”

“ But the general opinion on the water-front is that she won’t ? ”

“ The water-front does n’t know nor care.”

“ If you believe this, Great Scott, *you* ought

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to care ! Why don't you set the law on her ? Talk it up where it will do some good."

" These things are not done in a corner," Day retorted. " The law, or the public, is at liberty to use its eyes. I have no inside evidence ; and I may be mistaken. Go and see for yourself."

" What is it to me !" Clunie answered with a goaded look. " If you can wash your hands of it " —

" I did n't wash my hands till I had used what influence I have, in the only quarter where I am likely to have any. Sometimes I believe it, and then again I don't. I give you — or any friends of yours," Day added deliberately, " the benefit of my doubts."

Clunie did not thank him. He flushed as if stung. " If you have gone the length of warning those women," he said huskily, " you 've no right to stop there."

" What would you have me do ? "

" Go to the Board of Underwriters. Wake up the water-front, somehow."

" You are welcome to the job," said Day.

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“Go, and inform against the Parthenia, and get her unloaded. Who can tell she would n’t have gone out all right ? Every one will say it was done out of meanness, at the instigation of our bosses, and the Old Man will jump on us for getting the house into trouble with a rival line.”

Clunie got up with a furious look. “This whole business of going to sea in ships is rotten,” he swore ; “and your trade etiquette is the rottenest part of it.”

“It is all that keeps us from flying at one another’s throats,” said Day.

“Oh, well ! Whip the devil around the stump ! You ’ll get on, my son.”

As he spoke, Clunie’s face turned red and rigid. A girl’s voice could be heard asking, at the wrong desk, for Mr. Day ; and Morton went forward to speak to Annie Dunstan.

She had come for her monthly draft on the balance Captain Speke had left with the firm in her name. Usually they dispensed with the forms, and Clunie had saved her the trouble of coming. Day fancied that she glanced about



ANNIE DUNSTAN

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her rather wistfully ; she must have seen Clunie where he stood, but he did not move. He remained as if paralyzed until she was gone, when he rushed out, and Day saw him go tearing off in an opposite direction, with no excuse for leaving the shop, and no apology on his return.

The Parthenia was advertised to sail on a Thursday. On Tuesday evening Clunie came to his friend's room and took his favorite seat on the table with his foot on the nearest chair, tilting it back and forth in a manner most objectionable. But there was that in his face which cried for mercy.

"I cannot find her in the city," he said. "There are forty of the name in the Spanish quarter."

Day made no pretense of asking to whom he referred.

"You could get the address from Dowd," he said, without looking up.

"I won't go near the brute!" said Clunie. "You know the style of his inferences. Will you get it for me, old man? You are superior to inferences, you know."

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Neither of the two smiled at the familiar sarcasm. "I am the author of this scare," said Day. "Suppose you let me peddle it about?"

"You have taken care of your friends; these are my crowd. It's on me, this time," answered Clunie.

His wretched willingness to meet the issue Day had raised made it impossible not to relent.

"You should know best," he said. After a pause he added: —

"Did you notice how she was dressed, Clunie? And they don't travel as a rule. Somebody is taking care of her. I don't want to be a cynic, or discourage anybody's good intentions, but I don't see where you propose to come in — on the present arrangement? As a question of taking chances on that ship, it is simple enough. *I* can see that she is warned."

"You are simplifying things rather late, it strikes me. Why did n't you think of this before? Are you getting alarmed about me?"

"I don't know why I should n't be," Day replied. "Have you looked in the glass lately?

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You are looking very sick, Clunie — as you ought to look, for you are throwing away the greatest thing on earth ! Heaven does n't stoop to a man twice in his lifetime."

" If I had a heaven," said Clunie bitterly, " I should n't want it to stoop. It is possible that I know what I have missed, and why I missed it."

" But if you had n't missed it ? If you had won it, God knows how ! and could have it for the asking, would n't you rate your responsibilities a little differently ? You can't take in fresh cargo with the old stuff rotting in your hold. Unload, man, unload ! Tell her the truth. You never knew you had a conscience till she found it out for you. Go to her, and she will teach you how to use it."

" Go to her — with that story ! The girl a man could tell that to, and not forfeit his right to know her — she would n't be the kind to help him much."

" That is a matter of opinion," said Day. " I have known some good women, but I never knew a really good one who would want to

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spare herself the truth about a friend, if she could help him by knowing it."

"Assuming that she cared one way or the other!"

"She does care; you know that perfectly well."

"So much the worse for me, then."

They sat in silence after that, but for the infuriating bumping of the chair which Clunie kept up unconsciously. The owner pulled it away from him, and his foot came down heavily on the floor. Day was angry with his friend, doubly angry because he had put the test before him and could not save him from its logic, or prevent his headlong acceptance of its issues.

"Go to the devil your own way, then, but you shall not jog that chair," he said roughly.

Clunie laughed, and sat swinging his foot in the air. "If I don't go to the devil, it won't be your fault, old man. I suppose you know whose side you are on! Those arguments — don't I know 'em all by heart? Been over them a thousand times.

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“Did you see me that day I struck their trail? Did n’t I cut and run, by the fine instinct you advise me to follow? And what came of it? What comes when you’re called up for a caning, and you duck? You get it worse, that’s all.”

After a moment he said more gently, “I don’t know what I shall do, Mort; don’t know what there is to do. Seems some mistake about ‘never too late to mend.’ But we don’t duck this time, and we don’t pass ’em by on the other side.

“Come, Missus!” he rose, and Missus came forth from beneath the sofa where she had been investigating a hole in the wainscot. “We have explained ourselves to our friends, and our friends don’t approve of us.”

“It’s your fight, old man,” said Morton, “but I wish—I wish I had n’t stumped you to it! What name shall I ask for, beside ‘Concha’?”

The change in Clunie’s face was not pleasant to see. Day opened the door for him, with an impulse to bid him farewell. A high, pure

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hope was dead. What remained was the letter of the law,—a lie to be lived for life. This was another man's way of seeing it. Men of the English race are not happy in living a lie, or in seeing one fastened upon a fellow man, though it were the clog of a righteous punishment.

At Ward and McAlpine's, Day searched the Parthenia's passenger list. The name he looked for was not found. There was no Mexican or Spanish name on that list.

He sang hallelujahs to himself, and Dowd, perceiving he was happy, asked if he had recognized the name of a healthy creditor among the outward bound. But his information seemed to afford neither comfort nor relief to Clunie.

"It gives us less time," he said. "We shall have trouble stopping her now. She has taken another name."

"What's the matter with her taking her husband's name? She is married, or she is n't going."

Clunie shook his head. "You saw her take

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her passage. And if she had married he 'd be a Mexican. You don't know the place. Nothing stops there but the Pacific Mail, and no one goes ashore but the purser. I know every purser on the line."

The palpable aspects of life are hard to gainsay. On the dock next morning, amidst the stir of the steamer's departure, Day lost the clue to his previous fears. The Parthenia herself was such a huge, convincing reality. Where was there any suggestion of tragedy about her, or her crew getting in the lines, or her cool-eyed officers directing them ! Her freight was all on board ; only the passengers' trunks remained to be handled.

He saw Clunie walking fast toward him up the pier. He was pale, fresh-shaven, and soberly aware of himself. There was that in his look which made one think of a conscript who had just got his number. For whatever he was about to do, Day felt himself deeply responsible.

Clunie looked at him strangely. "They are on board," he said.

"For God's sake let them stay there ! We

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have been stirring up a mare's nest. Wake up," said Day, " and look about you. Are all these people mad ? "

Clunie passed his hand back of his friend's arm and let it rest a moment on his shoulder. " You are nervous, Mort. It is all done now. But ten to one if I can fetch them off ! "

" You never can in the world. You can't make those people decide. ' Poco tiempo,' she will say."

A light came into his face. " Then it is ' poco tiempo ' for me. If they go, I go with them."

" You don't, if I can help it ! "

" But the ship 's going out all right ; you have just said so."

" Not with you on board."

" Wake up yourself, Mort. You don't want to make a scene here ! But if you want to help me there is a thing " — Clunie lowered his voice and looked away. " If she should ever — Well, don't — don't let her think it was *what I wanted*. Tell her it came hard ; tell her why. Hands off now ! You 'll see me

The Prodigal

again. Good Lord, if this were the end of it!"

He shook himself free, and Morton watched his tweed shoulders and the fair boyish back of his head disappear in the press around the gangplank.

The voice of black Jake hailed him as, steering a loaded wheelbarrow, the big stevedore lurched past.

"Say, boss, ain't that Mist' Robert goin' aboard? Old man send for him after all?"

"He was sent for," said Morton grimly, "and he went."

"Let those trunks be. They belong ashore. That's what I said! You leave those boxes where they are!"

It was the voice of Clunie, close beside him. Morton turned, and there stood the late penitent, offensively alive and safe, with the woman and child he had chosen. He had come back to boast of his choice, apparently, for his face was ablaze with happiness. So amazing was the transformation that Day could not at first

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take in its full import ; then he wanted to strike the shameless front of him so lately pretending renunciation and self-sacrifice. He thought of an unquotable text about the dog that returns — as is the nature of dogs to do, but should not be the nature of men.

That poor girl in her childish finery, with her big, black sensuous eyes — what a judgment day for Clunie ! And the fool was content! — nay, triumphant, with a countenance of solemn, almost holy joy.

“ Day,” he said distinctly, with a studied deliberation as if forced to think of every word, “ please be presented to Mrs. — the Señora Reynolds. She is going to Liverpool to meet her husband, who is steward on the new Australian line, between Liverpool and Sydney. I have persuaded her to wait for the Roscommon, as you advised.” (As *he* advised !) Then to her in Spanish he explained that his friend, naming Day, would have the honor to escort her to her tram while he himself would see that her luggage was detained ashore and sent after

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her with the utmost expedition. And what might be the señora's address ?

She gave it, and with all grace and gravity assured him that her husband and her father and all her male relations were his servants for life. She was then transferred with her child and numerous portables to the dazed Morton's care. He made a scattering retreat with her across the tracks to a safe corner, where she entered into an animated exposition concerning her child, in answer to some obvious question of his, explaining that he was *muy grande* for his age. And he could walk — see ! She put him down upon his cushiony feet to prove it, where he rocked perilously and clung to her skirts. Then she held up four fingers and tapped her own white teeth, laughing, to show how advanced he was in dentition also. And was it not most horrible to think of those so many persons devoted to the deep — in that perfidious ship ? Did the señor also believe it ? She think some time she must be dreaming ! Don Clunio had spoken with the face of conviction absolute. Would she not leave the

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ship? Then would he take passage with her to England, or to — She rolled her great eyes expressively. They would be drowned all together. Because of that obligation since two years which he owe to the house of her father. She did not seek to be drowned. Ah God! Neither did she wish to be followed to England. She was between fire and water. Here she laughed hysterically. Don Clunio — he was the whirlwind. When the whirlwind take you, you go!

The car arrived, and Morton, helping her to mount the step, had the satisfaction to see upon her ungloved hand the authentic wedding ring. So the fortuitous Reynolds was no myth.

Clunie was still in the thick of the battle of the trunks. Bad language was flying about his ears; every man belonging to the ship was angry with him, but he was superior to abuse. Also he was using a little money in subordinate quarters. At last the señora's boxes were cut out and delivered to a grinning expressman. Clunie turned to his friend; he was wet with perspiration and pale about the mouth. The

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hand he held out was shaking. Day grasped it and he raised his hat. The damp sea wind blew in his face and cooled his hot brow and dripping hair.

“Commuted!” He spoke low, with an awed look.

“It was Concha, then?”

“Concha, by all that’s merciful! Don’t you remember Reynolds? He was steward on the *Colomba*. I had forgot the stewards go ashore at Cape St. Lucas. They go ashore to buy green turtle.”

Here was a blow to tragedy! So did Ariadne, after Theseus deserted her, turn to the good things of this world, and marry Bacchus. But Day wisely refrained from calling attention to this parallel. His friend was no cynic, and at times he lacked a sense of humor.

In those days there were no trolley lines running from the ferries to the Cliff House. The young men were reduced to horse hire in order to compass the distance in time, scant time, for a last look at the Parthenia. As they were hastening to the nearest livery stable, a large

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female with a market basket held them up, and fixed her rolling eyeballs upon Clunie. It was mother Egypt, awakened from her calm. Her manner to him was a mixture of the truculent and caressing.

“ Go ‘way, go ‘way f’om heah ! Dat ain’ you ! Youse on the Partheny, goin’ off ’thout sayin’ good-by ! ”

“ Where did you get that yarn ? ” asked Clunie without a change of feature.

“ T ain’t no ya’n. I knows when niggah lyin’. Jake say he seen you, an’ I b’liebe him.”

“ Jake has got a head on him this morning,” said Clunie ; “ and you are blocking the road. Make way.”

“ *Ain’t* you goin’ on the Partheny, fo’ sure ? Way is you goin’ then ? ”

“ Is that any business of yours ? ” Clunie stood with his hands in his pockets resignedly.

“ Mist’ Clunie ! You scare me to deaf ! You *ghos’* was walkin’ up dat gang-plang, fo’ a wa’nin’. Youse goin’ on dat ship some day, an’ youse gwine be drown’ ! ”

The Prodigal

“ All right,” said Day. “ It was his ghost ! I saw it myself.”

“ Anyhow, you make me tell a big lie amongst you, an’ somebody gwine feel bad. Black Jake tell me, an’ I tell Miss Annie, an’ she don’ say nothin’. Her face tu’n gray like a li’l stone image, an’ she git her hat an’ go out de house, an’ I ain’t seen her ; an’ I got to go back to dat chile right now. I lef’ him ’ith that fool gal ’cross de street. Mist’ Clunie — no foolin’ now ! Don’ you ever in you’ bo’n life set foot abo’d dat ship — dat Partheny. She ain’t right, somehow. You been wa’ned ! ”

“ I was warned all right and I took the warning,” said Clunie. “ Now get out of the road.”

She wagged her head at him solemnly. “ What fo’ you ain’ been neah us fo’ two whole weeks ? What you been doin’ roun’ town ? Look like you been raisin’ Cain wid you’self somehow.”

“ I ’ll raise Cain with you, if you don’t step on.”

She whacked him archly with her basket.

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Some loose paper fell out, which he made into a wad and tossed after her.

“That’s how a thing flies in this world,” he groaned. “God knows why I have to meet that old fiend at every turn !”

“There is a side to it that’s not all bad,” said Day, slightly embarrassed. They were urging their horse up Sutter Street, and talking against the noise of the wheels.

“What is that ?” asked Clunie.

“Well, supposing you should ever feel the need of confessing yourself to — in a certain quarter” —

“I’m not likely to be taken that way very soon,” said Clunie dryly.

“I’m supposing a case. I think our colored friend has probably saved you the necessity. Yet the lady is still your friend ! Putting it in the case of another person — say myself — how would you argue from that ?”

“How often must I tell you, Mort, that I don’t consider myself in a position to argue, or to think, or to speculate in that quarter. So drop it, if you please !”

The Prodigal

"All in good time," said the irrepressible young wiseacre. "What will you bet the Parthenia goes out all right, after all?"

"I'm not betting on human lives this morning," replied Clunie. And the conversation dropped.

It was the old Cliff House, then, and the old cliff walk, before the pleasure dome of Sutro was decreed. It is well we should all be happy in our own way,—the democratic way,—but the happiness of crowds is a fatal thing in nature. There were no board fences then, cutting one off from following the old sea paths deep bitten into the wind-sheared turf.

They put their horse up at the hotel, and tramped out toward the Golden Gate—the Gate of Eternity to many souls that day! The wind boomed in their ears, and laid the wild lilies flat in their beds on the seaward slopes. In an instant they saw that every sign was against the ship: wind and tide opposing, and a strong tide running out; and the whitecaps, as it looked from shore, were great combers on the Bar.

Already the Parthenia was far out beyond

The Prodigal

help. Her passengers were thinking of their luncheons. The two spectators watched her come nosing around the cliff. They marked how she wallowed and settled by her stern quarter. They were letting the air out of her then ; she was part in air and part in water ballast when she met the Bar. A beast of a Bar it was that morning. It clapped paw upon her, rolled her to larboard, let her recover once, then rolled her to starboard, as a cat tumbles a mouse, and the play was over. Her stern went under sideways, her staggering bow shot up, and she sank, like a coffin, with all on board.

So sudden and silent and prepared it was, she might have walked out there, a deliberate suicide, and made away with herself. And so strong was the ship's personality that it was quite a moment before the two witnesses of her fate could gather the sense that she was not perishing alone, but was digging the grave of living men and women.

Then they tore away for the life-saving station.

At some distance ahead of them on the narrow



A STRONG TIDE RUNNING OUT

The Prodigal

cliff path they saw a little figure running with arms outspread, — a girl, bareheaded, dressed in black. As they closed upon her, they saw her wild face turned to the empty sea. It was Annie Dunstan, white as the surf, sobbing against the wind, her skirts stroked back, the dark hair whipped across her forehead. She forced her way against the blast as if pulled onward straight for the spot where the ship went down. As Clunie called to her she looked back, swerved, and almost fell. He could not stop ; he could not leave her. Hand in hand, seizing her, and half carrying her they ran on, all three, without question, as if bound by invisible cords to the sinking ship. The girl's strength gave out soon. "Go on !" she gasped. "Don't wait for me."

"There is no hope !" Clunie knelled in her ear.

"Go on ! There must be hope !" Day was now ahead of them.

"Will you wait, — Annie ? Will you wait here for me ?"

She motioned him onward ; she flung him

The Prodigal

with her whole might, as it were, toward the spot where succor was needed. It was her own pure soul of helpfulness that she offered up in him, and he felt it through and through him. He knew he should save lives that day. Her strength in him should not be wasted.

Weeks had passed. The Parthenia's dead were buried — all that the sea gave up — the friendless and the stranger at company charges. For the Catholic seamen church rites and a place in consecrated ground had been purchased of the Fathers, at so many dollars per soul ; the souls being many, the price was somewhat abated. The Fathers had no wish to take advantage.

On a day about this time, Clunie was called into the private office and informed with considerable impressiveness, by his chief, that the London uncles had sent for him. No barks or brigs this time, but a first-class cabin passage on a famous greyhound line and a handsome balance to his credit to cover all contingent expenses.

The Prodigal

Clunie stood considering. There was less than the expected satisfaction in his face. "Would this money be mine?" he inquired, referring to the deposit. "Does it come out of my father's estate?"

"I think it would be safe to put it that way," the chief replied with his customary caution. "Your uncles are evidently prepared to recognize your claim."

"Which I never made — on them," Clunie reminded him.

"Quite true. But the intention is, I fancy, to make it very pleasant for you over there. My brother," Mr. Bradshaw added kindly, "has been able to give a good account of you since you have been with us."

"I am very glad to hear it, and I thank you, sir. I could find use for that money, now," said Clunie, brightening, "but not to go to London."

Mr. Bradshaw looked the youngster over in amazement. "It is a fair wind; better take it while it holds."

"There is a fairer wind for me" — Clunie

The Prodigal

turned his ardent eyes away. “ I am not ready to go to London.”

Not ready to go — where an English family welcome awaited him, not ready to step into a fortune in trust ! “ I hope this has nothing to do with pride, or pique ? ” the old chief protested solemnly. “ Your uncles are not young men.”

“ No, sir ; and my father is not a young man. If he had sent for me I should go at once. But they say it is too late for that. The uncles have been in no haste to see me. Why should I be in such a hurry to go ? ”

“ Will you tell me if you have any special reason for delay — any claim upon you here ? ”

“ I have,” answered Clunie. “ When I do go I wish to take my wife with me.” He spoke fast ; Mr. Bradshaw did not quite follow.

“ Your wife ! ” he repeated dazedly. “ Are you married, Robert ? When in the world did you do that ? ”

“ I am not married yet,” Clunie explained, with his flashing smile ; “ but I hope to be by the time I start for London.”

“ Well ! Well ! ” said Mr. Bradshaw, his

The Prodigal

disgust plainly visible. “ This puts a new face on the matter. I wish I could congratulate you. But why be in such a hurry ? You are only a boy. You’ve a long life before you.”

“ *I need* a long life,” said Clunie, “ and it can’t begin too soon. We are booked for the voyage ; it’s a straight course, this time. There is nothing between us now — nothing but a trifle of money — between us and the stars of home.”

Mr. Bradshaw coughed his dismay. “ But where — where do you call ‘ home ’ ? Not Auckland ? ”

“ Rather ! ” laughed Clunie. His nostrils widened ; his eye was far-fixed ; he dreamed awake, and saw beyond the dingy maps on the office walls, beyond the fog in the street outside. The wash of sunlit seas was in his ear.

“ Home first, London after — if my father is still there. But I’ve a notion that I shall find him when we go home.”

When “ we ” go home ! So it was all settled. Mr. Bradshaw could not help his distrust of Clunie’s wisdom in the direction of that confi-

The Prodigal

dent "we." His fading smile expressed discreet but not unfriendly incredulity. "Well," he concluded sadly, "you ought to know which way is 'home' by this time—you have tried all the roads. But I would write to the uncles first, by all means. Write at once. And while you are about it, why not send a few words to your father through them. Just a line or two, quite simply — what you are doing — that sort of thing."

Clunie flushed, hesitating. Then he confessed, looking his chief in the eye, "I have been writing to my father — on the chance, you know — regularly, for the past six months. Can't say what they did with my letters ? "

"Why, they read them to him, of course. The very best thing you could have done. No doubt it has had an excellent effect upon your prospects" —

"Do you think I did it for that ? "

"Cer-tainly not! But it was a good thing all around. It may have had something to do with the improvement they speak of in your father's condition of late. But whether it helped

The Prodigal

him or not it has helped you.” The old chief’s gaze dwelt mistily on the face he had learned to love: the rich dark coloring, the blue eyes, the mouth steady and stern. “*Something* has helped you,” he pronounced, “and God knows you needed help when I saw you first !”

Hand clasped in hand, the two men confronted each other. “It’s a sad pity your father cannot see you, Robert. On my soul, I believe it would finish his cure. It would make him young again. Don’t wait too long, my boy. Find him, wherever he is. It is never safe to say in this world, ‘It is too late; the time has gone by.’ ”

Mr. Bradshaw touched a bell. To the office boy who answered it, he said: “Ask Mr. Wayland to make out a check to Mr. Clunie Robert. How much shall you want, Mr. Robert ? ”

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